

Medicine Bow Landscape Vegetation Analysis (LaVA)

Meeting Minutes

Cooperating Agency Meeting
September 19, 2018; 10:00 am – 3:00 pm
In person or Telephone

In Attendance:

Russ Bacon - FS	Josh Van Vlack – State Forestry	Kelle Reynolds - FS
Dave Gloss - FS	Steve Loose - FS	Josh Peck - FS
Beth Callaway – Gov’s Office	Katie Cheesbrough - WGFD	Mark Conrad - WGFD
Embere Hall - WGFD	Justin Williams - DOA	Lisa Solberg-Schwab - FWS
Dena Egenhoff - BOPU	Brian Hall - DEQ	Leanne Correll - SERCD
Eli Allen – Cons. District	Jack Cobb – Cons. District	Melissa Martin - FS
Larry Hicks - LSRCD	Tait Rutherford - FS	

ACTION ITEMS:

- **Project Talking Points:** Update talking points for the LaVA Project to ensure consistent messaging, particularly when talking to the public. **Aaron Voos**
- **External Pinyon Updates:** Upload CARA Content Analysis Reports, meeting PowerPoint, and Master DEIS Edits Spreadsheet to the External Pinyon site by Friday, September 20. **Melissa Martin**
- **Lynx Discussion:** Arrange meeting with Katie Cheesbrough, Mark Conrad, and/or Embere Hall of WGFD to discuss Response to Comments on lynx analysis and determinations. **Steve Loose**
- **No Action Alternative:** Establish a Small Group to discuss how to frame the No Action Alternative. **Melissa Martin** (Scheduled for Monday, September 24)
- **Decision-trigger Table, DEIS Appendix A, Attachment 2:** Send word document to Cooperators and request edits by Friday September 28. Include as an agenda topic at our next CA meeting. **Melissa Martin** (Word version was emailed to CAs on September 19).
- **ECA:** 1) Continue internal FS discussions to better define ECA modeling, what’s included in the model, and how it should be applied. The 80-year recovery period needs to be part of the internal discussions regarding triggers/thresholds. 2) Invite interested Cooperators to engage in a follow-up meeting. 3) Present ECA discussions/decisions at the next Cooperating Agency meeting **Kelle Reynolds/Melissa Martin**
- **Content Analysis:** 1) Refine the Content Analysis by Friday, September 28; 2) Consolidate relevant comments for single response and identify ‘non-response’ comments by October 1; 3) Determine if Small Groups are needed and solicit help accordingly no later than October 2. **Melissa Martin**

AGENDA TOPICS:

1. Forest Supervisor Time

DISCUSSION

We have a lot of work to do to finalize the FEIS. This is a team effort. We would like cooperators to assist in Response to Comments and with incorporating comments into the FEIS. Comments from cooperators have been very helpful – most of them are focused on improving the project. Recent fires have increased Russ's commitment to the LaVA Project to increase decision space on fires.

Cooperator comments and feedback:

- A schedule of the next few months would be helpful, to know what meetings everyone needs to be at.
- Litigation? We're not sure. There will be objections; we need to be ready with supplemental information.
- Concerns about internal perception regarding the project. This is a new type of project; we are likely to have varying degrees of support for the project but we need to maintain professionalism. Specialists need to disclose both positive and negative effects of the project.
- Regional Office feelings about project? No concerns; RO is looking for ways to support the project. RO and SO are in alignment.

2. DEIS Content Analysis

DISCUSSION

Melissa presented information about the Content Analysis, coding methods, and highlighted a few major concern themes.

Statistics: We received 118 comments letters; 97 unique letters and 21 form letters. Collectively, roughly 800 individual comments were coded.

Process: We're using a FS database called CARA to assist with the content analysis; CARA allows us to run many reports and categorize the data in different formats and is more powerful than the tradition way of conducting content analyses. We started by developing a coding structure, using the scoping content analysis as a starting point, and then refining it by completing a quick review of several letters. We then cross-checked three of the more detailed comment letters against the coding structure before processing the remaining letters. For the most part, the content analysis is accurate; there is some room for improvement and we will be reviewing the reports this week and next week.

Next Steps: To determine which comments need a response; how 'similar' comments can be lumped so as to craft only one response; which comments could result in supplemental analysis; etc.

General Concern Themes and Suggestions:

Climate change (CC):

- **Action:** Review CC analyses in N Savery and other landscape-level analyses for suggested edits;
- **Action:** Include language about FS Climate Change policies in EIS to articulate regulatory requirements for analysis of CC.

- **Action:** Include language about how warmer temperatures, longer drought periods, and longer fire seasons, all facets of CC, further demonstrate the need for the project (i.e. resilience); esp. regarding watershed health.
- Wyoming State Climate Office would be a good resource for info on CC science
- Roads, the transportation system in general, and CC were identified by WildEarth Guardians as a concern.

Range of alternatives:

- Commenters expressed a need to develop an additional action alternative removing roadless areas, Sheep Mountain in particular, from consideration. This alternative was considered but eliminated from detailed study in the DEIS.
- **Action:** Review rationale for eliminating this alternative; bolster if necessary.
- Including IRAs in a landscape-level analysis is important for holistic management and many TOAs were identified by CAs to further their agency missions.

Purpose and need:

- *Response consideration:* We need to manage because the forest has been altered by historic anthropogenic activity. We can't start to allow "natural processes" to prevail now.
- **Action:** Bolster the Purpose and Need statements; incorporate CC argument.

Temporary roads:

- **Action:** Clearly articulate regulations and rules that guide action throughout the document. This would help convey that there are restrictions on temporary road construction. The 'temporary road' description section of Chapter 2 might be an appropriate place.
- **Action:** Discuss which activities would likely require temporary road construction (i.e. temporary roads will primarily be built in association with commercial timber harvest).
- **Action:** Include pictures about before and after w/ temp roads. Include description of reclamation.

Inadequate analysis:

- **Action:** Supplement the No Action alternative to include a better description of the consequences of catastrophic fire. Differentiate between types of fire severities. Talk about benefits of management versus allowing natural processes such as fire.
- **Action:** Review this Concern Theme for additional comments ASAP so we can assess their validity and potential need for supplemental analysis. The Content Analysis reflects numerous comments regarding inadequate analyses.

Economics:

- **Action:** Consider projected timber activity as part of economic analysis of the No Action alternative.
- **Action:** Include discussion about NEPA efficiency and reduced planning costs associated with the Modified Proposed Action v. No Action.

Sheep Mtn Game Refuge:

- **WGFD can provide assistance in addressing this comment.**

Wildlife:

- **Action:** Include a discussion about aspen-dependent species under the No Action.
- **Action:** Explain cumulative effects analysis requirements for TES species (e.g., lynx) in the EIS.
- **Action:** Discuss the effects of fire on lynx habitat under the No Action.
- **Action:** Organize a meeting specific to lynx; invite interested CAs.

Next Steps – Responding to Comments

NOTE: More work is required to refine the Content Analysis before workloads and potential assistance needed can be determined.

Goals include:

- Refining the Content Analysis by Friday, September 28.
- Consolidating relevant comments for single response and identifying ‘non-response’ comments by October 1.
- Determine if Small Groups are needed and solicit help accordingly no later than October 2.

WGFD is willing to help; electronically might be necessary sometimes due to increased workloads with hunting seasons. Other Cooperators also expressed a willingness to help.

What are we Doing Right Now to be Responsive?

- New TOA map depicting non-timber management areas as a different TOA color; this map also includes a ‘no temporary road’ layer. (Attached to notes)
- Developed a Master DEIS Edits Spreadsheet that we are continually adding to so that we capture and address all suggested edits;
- Working to bolster Cumulative Effects analyses and provide consistent analysis. We will be dedicating a section to cumulative effects in FEIS Chapter 3.
- Working to more clearly define the No Action alternative and the types of actions that could be expected absent the LaVA Project.

Discussion regarding framing of NAA:

- Quantifying 10 yr. activity averages (e.g., timber sales, prescribed fire, and habitat improvements) would be helpful if that’s what we decide the No Action is.
- Concerns were expressed regarding the dip in timber production during the early part of the past decade. This could skew averages.
- Would representing large amounts of timber management under the No Action undermine justification for LaVA? Response: No, because we’re looking at the whole landscape, multiple use management package. LaVA is not just about hitting timber targets. We need to give a qualitative description, rather than just a quantitative description, of how timber would work under the No Action.
- **Action:** Emphasize that you lose benefits of cooperative process w/ collaborators under the No Action.
- We need to be transparent about assumptions under the No Action. We have to be careful on either end, whether we assume no timber, the 10 yr. average, or some other metric.

CONCLUSION

Collaborators are interested in helping with response to comments. They have several specific suggestions, listed in the discussion notes above. Small groups meetings with collaborators and FS team will likely be helpful in responding to some themes (e.g. lynx analysis, assumptions under the No Action, etc.).

3. Equivalent Clearcut Acres

DISCUSSION

Kelle presented an overview of work done since comments were received, i.e., we've completed a preliminary analysis of comments specific to ECA; held a meeting with Regional Office staff to discuss analysis strategies; and held an internal ECA Small Group meeting to review comments and ECA model parameters.

Suggestions:

- **Action:** Clarify ECA triggers/thresholds in Decision-trigger Table and Pre- and Implementation Checklists.
- Developing a 'green-yellow-red' concept would allow flexibility;
- There needs to be cooperation b/t the FS and the other levels of government to allow incorporation of their expertise; this collective decision-making regarding ECA is important to cooperators.
- **Action:** Provide Cooperators with information about sideboards on ECA thresholds and where in the EIS things might be changed.
- **Action:** Organize a meeting with interested Cooperators to further discuss ECA.

CONCLUSION

We will continue this discussion in a Small Group before the next Cooperator's meeting. We will report findings at the next meeting.

4. LaVA Adaptive Implementation Framework

DISCUSSION

Melissa explained that the FS used the Badger Creek fire as a Pilot for assessing the sufficiency of Appendix A: Adaptive Implementation Framework and its attachments.

Pre-implementation Checklist:

- May not need check box for assessing slopes and sensitive soils. Slope is a forest plan standard; slope is covered in Design Features and Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines check box.
- May need longer description of motivation/justification/prioritization for any project that fits under LaVA ROD. Maybe add a box that says resource benefit.
- Map of projects would be helpful. Include a box at the top that explicitly lists areas that will be affected.
- Delete the NEPA Document box for projects occurring under LaVA.
- Consider wording the Greater Sage-grouse bullet in the same way as the lynx bullet.
- Consider including a bullet about whether the project would affect old-growth. There was a lot of disagreement about during which phase of project development the analysis of old-growth should occur.
- **Decision/Action:** Strike the GRSG box; do not include a box for old-growth. Instead, expand upon the Design Features / Standards and Guidelines bullet by incorporating selected examples including GRSG and old-growth.

Attachment 2: Decision-making Triggers:

- Changes to BMPs
 - Monitoring: should probably monitor every 3-5 years, rather than annually; consider broad language allowing discretion in intervals and location of monitoring—this would allow us to focus on the goals of monitoring (e.g. learning together, doing the right thing on the ground, and adjusting action); there's some question about whether there should be more detail in the language to specify where and when the monitoring will occur
- **Question:** What's the goal of the table? **Response:** We want to demonstrate responsiveness to public comments and to ensure that project implementation complies with the analysis, the LaVA ROD, the Forest Plan, and other laws, regulations, and policies.
- **Action Item:** Send a word version of the Table to Cooperators and solicit comments by Friday, September 28. Review consolidated comments at the next Cooperator meeting.

CONCLUSION

A lot of changes were suggested; we will continue the discussion about Attachment 2 at the next meeting.

5. LaVA Team Members

DISCUSSION

Discussion regarding turnover of staff involved in LaVA:

- **Action:** Establish an annual review meeting among cooperators. **Note:** This is already part of the Implementation Framework.
- Each cooperator will address this issue within their own administrators
- **Action:** Following signature of the ROD, develop a formal MOU with Cooperators. This instrument would solidify working relationships and how projects are furthered.
- Consider developing a joint annual report to tell the success stories—doesn't need to be a big publication, but just a quick document for distribution (maybe a story map); this would be in addition to the annual monitoring report.

CONCLUSION

Everyone is thinking about the continuity of commitments, and we probably start drafting out an MOU during the objection period.

6. Project Timeline

DISCUSSION

Melissa presented major project milestones:

- **September:** Finalize Content Analysis
- **October 22:** Draft Response to Comments Due
- **November 9:** Supplemental Specialist Reports Due
- **December 1:** Final EIS and Draft ROD to Editor

- **January 7, 2018:** Release FEIS and draft ROD for Objection
- **February 2019:** Objection Resolution
- **March 2019:** Signed ROD; Project Implementation

Note: We may need to take advantage of other resource areas to be able to meet deadlines.

Action: Factor time into the timeline to allow Cooperator review of the FEIS.

CONCLUSION

It will be hard to meet deadlines, but we can do it with hard work, some help, and dedication.

7. Meeting Wrap-up

DISCUSSION

- Please see Action Items, above.

Agenda Topics for the next meeting:

- Report-out from established Small Groups (e.g., No Action; ECA; Lynx; Climate Change)
- Review of suggested Decision-trigger Table edits.
- Update on Content Analysis
- Action: Melissa is to upload information resulting from the Small Groups to Pinyon prior to the next Cooperator's meeting.

Action: Cooperators are to provide feedback on the Decision-triggers Table by Friday, September 28.

CONCLUSION

We will have a lot of communication and feedback going on throughout the period between now and the next Cooperator's Meeting (October 17).

Meeting adjourned.